



STEPS TO A HEALTHIERUS

::WORKFORCE::





Steps to a Healthier US Workforce

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related injury and illness, is unveiling the *Steps to a Healthier US Workforce* initiative to encourage the creation of workplace safety and health programs that focus on both workplace and personal risk factors. At the heart of this effort lie both personal responsibility for the choices Americans make and social responsibility to ensure that policy makers support programs that foster healthy behaviors and prevent disease.

Vision

The vision of this initiative is to integrate occupational safety and health protection with health promotion activities into a coordinated system that addresses both workplace and worker health. This initiative strongly supports the view that all illness and injury should be prevented when possible, controlled when necessary, and treated where appropriate.

Why Steps to a Healthier US Workforce is Needed

The protection, preservation, and improvement of the health of people who work are goals shared by workers, their families, and their employers. Ill health and injury, whether caused by work or resulting from off-work activities, reduces income, quality of life, and opportunity, not only for the directly affected individuals but also for those dependent on them. Health-related productivity of the American workforce is critical to business profitability. Since Americans spend an average of 8-12 hours a day at work, the workplace is an ideal locus for developing a healthier workforce. This effort encompasses two interrelated components, both of which affect workforce health and employers' bottom line: 1) preventing work-related illness, injury, and disability, and 2) promoting healthy living and lifestyles to reduce and prevent chronic disease. Until now, most workplace health promotion programs and workplace safety and health programs have functioned independently without collaborative interactions. Health promotion programs have generally focused on the individual's personal and lifestyle risk factors, e.g. lack of physical activity, poor nutrition, and tobacco



use, while workplace safety and health programs have focused on workplace risks, such as chemicals, noise, and other unsafe working conditions. This separation obscures opportunities for collaborative efforts that will improve the health of the U.S. workforce, enhance productivity, and reduce health care and other costs associated with both occupational and non-occupational illnesses and injuries.

Steps to a Healthier US Workforce:

A Collaborative Effort

The success of this initiative requires the involvement of both workers and employers to create a workplace that embraces both workplace health protection and personal health promotion. The first ‘Step’ involves the participation of partners from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), industry, labor, academia, and professional groups on a planning committee to help develop a framework for the initiative, and plan a national Symposium for 2004. The Symposium will inaugurate the initiative and help identify effective strategies and models for integrating workplace efforts to protect and improve the health of America’s workers.

Healthy Working & Healthy Living

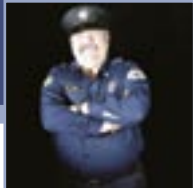
Healthy Working

The health of the U.S. economy depends on a healthy and productive workforce, and the U.S. has a powerful resource in its 146.5 million workers. Yet,

- 5,524 occupational fatalities occurred in 2002, ¹
- 5.2 million non-fatal injuries and illnesses occurred in 2001 in the private sector alone,² and
- The estimated direct costs for occupational injuries and illnesses reached \$40.1 billion in 1999, with over \$200 billion of indirect costs.³

Healthy Living

Lifestyle behaviors around physical activities, nutrition, tobacco smoking, and substance abuse have a significant impact on people’s health. These lifestyle exposures contribute to many diseases



including type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, obesity, and some forms of cancer. According to the (CDC),⁴ each year

- At least 300,000 people die from illnesses associated with obesity;
- 440,000 die from illnesses attributed to cigarette smoking; and
- 40% of all deaths are caused by heart disease or stroke.

Workplace-based screening programs for early detection of chronic disease also benefit workers and employers.

These statistics illustrate that investments in preventing occupational and non-occupational illness, injury, and disability experienced by the U.S. workforce can have a significant impact on the health-related productivity of American business.

Combining Healthy Working & Healthy Living

This initiative creates an opportunity for both the occupational safety and health community and the health promotion community to develop and implement workplace programs collaboratively that prevent workplace illness and injury, promote health, and optimize the health of the U.S. workforce.

As some other countries have experience with such integrated models, we are inviting experts from around the world to take part in this initiative. Ultimately, this initiative will engage NIOSH and its diverse stakeholders in the development of new strategies to improve the health of both the U.S. workforce and the U.S. workplace.

References

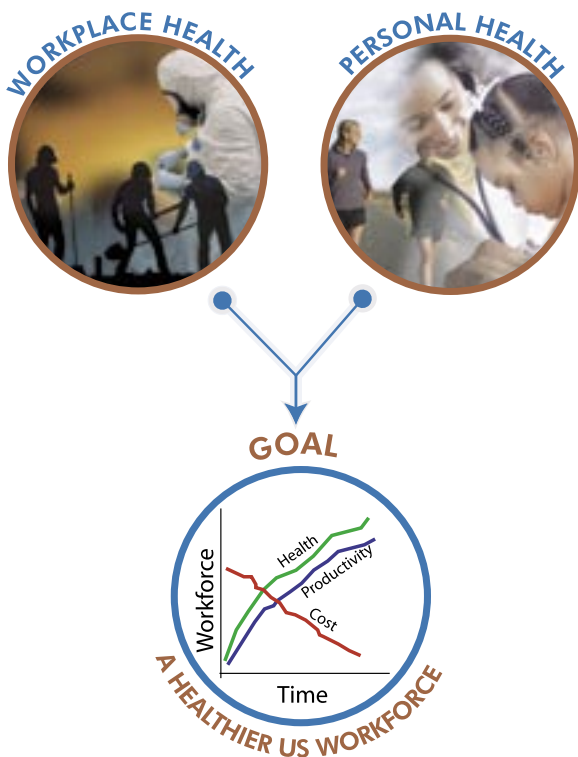
¹BLS. *National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 2002*. USDL 03-488. September 17, 2003.

²BLS. *Annual Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2001*. USDL. 02-687. December 19, 2002.

³*The Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index. 2002*

⁴CDC. *The Burden of Chronic Diseases and Their Risk Factors. National and State Perspectives. 2002*.

“Linking Workplace Protection & Workplace Health Promotion: Synergy in Action”



Join us for

*2004 Steps To A Healthier US Workforce
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For more information go to

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